Part I *Self-Determination: From Legislation to Giving Rational Accounts*

1. Accounts and Accountability: The Importance of Being *Autologizomenos*

Amber D. Carpenter

[1]1.1. Introduction: *Autonomia* in Athens – not in Kallipolis

Given the established usage of *autonomos* in Herodotus (I.96), and its free usage in Thucydides, along with *autonomia* and *autonomeomai* to mean a city '[living under] its own laws/customs [*nomoi*]' – hence, independence of foreign imposition – it is notable that no form of *autonomos* appears in Plato's *Republic*, concerned as it obviously is with exploring conceptions of self-mastery, independence and freedom. Living by its own laws or customs is what every city-state aspired to in the long, dreary course of the Peloponnesian war, and although the primary use of *autonomos* was to qualify cities, Xenophon is able to turn it easily enough to qualify persons.[2] His *Constitution of the Lacedaemonions* 3.1 uses *autonomous* not to describe a city's ability to live by its own laws, but an individual's ability to live independently of imposition from another:

> When a boy ceases to be a child, and begins to be a lad, others release him from his moral tutor and his schoolmaster: he is then no longer under a ruler and is allowed to go his own way [*autonomous aphiasin*].[3]

When we consider in addition that the whole set-up of the *Republic* involves importing political concepts to interpret the personal – in particular presenting justice as an internal quality of soul on the model of justice in cities – it begins to seem astonishing that Plato would *not* have helped

[1] I would like to thank the editors for their first invitation to be a part of this project, and to pursue these inquiries; and I thank also the audience of fellow-contributors at our conference, where this work benefitted from excellent questions and suggestions; my gratitude in particular to Franco Trivigno, whose comments on a later draft have pushed me to be clearer on important points. Audiences at Tartu and Boston University have greatly helped in clarifying the focal point of this piece. And the two anonymous readers for the press offered excellent queries and suggestions which have improved this piece. My grateful thanks to them.

[2] See also Sophocles' *Antigone* 821 for another instance of the personal use of *autonomos*.

[3] Translated by E. C. Marchant and G. W. Bowersock. (Xenophon. *Scripta Minora*, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1925), vol. 183; *hotan ge mēn ek paidōn eis to meirakioustha ekbainōsi, tēnikauta hoi men alloi pauousi men apo paidagūgōn, pauousi de apo didaskakōn, archousi de oudenes eti aoutōn, all'autonomous aphiasin.* (Xenophon. *Xenophontis opera omnia*, Oxford Classical Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1920, 1969), vol. 5).

himself to a move that Xenophon makes so naturally, particularly when the substance of his remarks is so very nearly the same.[4] His failure to do so is, I think, conspicuous and telling.

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Autonomia as a political ideal takes it as given that it is good for a city to live under its own customs just because they are *its own* customs. To analogise this to the individual case, the implicit claim would be that the ideal is to live following one's own maxims, whatever they may be, simply because they are one's own. Such a sense of 'autonomy' probably captures a modern colloquial use of the term rather well (although Kant, for whom autonomy is morally significant, thought the concept through rather more carefully), but it is very far from anything Plato would advocate in the *Republic*.[5] Neither presumably is this Xenophon's suggestion when he uses *autonomos* to describe an individual – for Xenophon is *not* taking the individual as an analogue to the city here. Rather, he takes the implicit normativity of the political use of the term for granted: it is good for a city to live by its own customs;[6] and to achieve this good it is useful for individuals themselves to become *autonomos* in the sense of having sufficiently inculcated their city's customs so that they do not need someone else on hand to teach or remind them of these.[7] Although the independence applies to the individual, the individual is free from external constraint only by virtue of having internalised the laws of the city and thus constituting a polis as free. If such autonomy is worth achieving, it will be because it is good for cities to be autonomous.

We can see in Plato's silence a diagnosis and a critique of both of these ways of construing *autonomia* as an appropriate aim, or a good. Taking it as an analogue, it is quite obviously the case that the fact that a habit or maxim is one's own is, in fact, no reason at all that one ought to live by it. In order to make this remotely plausible, one must (as Kant does) artificially restrict who one 'really' is, so that only the right sort of maxims could be 'one's own'. But taken

[4] Notice how Socrates says the same thing here as Xenophon did above, but without recourse to *autonomos*: 'This is clearly the aim of the law, which is the ally of everyone. But it's also our aim in ruling our children, we don't allow them to be free (*eleutherous*) until we establish a constitution in them, just as in a city, and – by fostering their best part with our own – equip them with a guardian and ruler similar to our own to take our place. Then, and only then, we set them free.' (*Rep*. 590c–591a.)

[5] Consider the *Symposium*'s strong claim that what matters is not whether something is our own (*oikeios*) but whether it is *good* – for 'people are even willing to cut off their own feet and hands if they suppose these things of theirs to be injurious [*ponēros*]' (*Symp*. 205e3–5).

[6] See, for instance, Xenophon's *Hellenica* 6.3.8 for this more familiar political use of *autonomia*.

[7] Presumably the preceptors and tutors are not up to now meant to have been idle, nor to have taught only technical skills. They have been there to offer guidance, and if they have done their job well, to instill principles and customs such that their charge will not continue to need their guidance in each case, indefinitely.

Xenophon-wise as a kind of personal independence through which a city-state constitutes itself as living by its own customs is hardly an improvement – for in fact, it is no better for a city to follow whatever customs it may happen to have than it is for an individual. Following one's own customs is only so good as the customs themselves, and their quality is measured by quite a different standard than whether they are one's own.

Nevertheless, there does seem to be some kind of important practical good in the personal independence that Xenophon describes as being *autonomous.* It would be some sort of failure if one never came to the point where one could be trusted to go out and act in the world without the constant companionship and advice of one's preceptor. Being able to act decently of one's own accord is an important achievement. This is an achievement and a good which Plato acknowledges in the *Republic*, in all the vexed talk of self-rule and self-mastery. But such self-rule, I shall argue, is not best brought under the problematic notion of autonomy; rather, it turns out to be properly understood, and attained, as an epistemic quality of being *autologizomenos*, being able to give accounts for oneself.[8]

1.2. Autonomy and its Alternative

In order to make good this claim, however, we must first see something of the grammar of 'autonomy' in moral discourse.

At root, autonomy is a matter of laying down the law or rule (*nomos*), typically of conduct, from oneself and to oneself.[9] The principle determining an action as *this* action (the rule or maxim it follows) must be in and from oneself; and it must be *to oneself* that one lays down the law, so that one is the source of authority for the rule of conduct and one is one's own enforcer of that rule. The implicit contrast is with the stipulation of, the source of authority for, or the power of enforcement of the law coming from outside oneself – from an *other* (*heteros*).

[8] On the account to be unfolded here, then, it is not only in the dialogues without a partition of the soul that, as Trivigno (p. 75 [of the typescript we were sent], this volume) argues, the notion of self-rule is cast in terms of knowledge and ignorance; this discussion focuses on what Trivigno considers the movement to full, rather than intermediate, self-rule in the *Republic*.

[9] This is of course reminiscent of Kant's way of describing autonomy, and this is not entirely accidental. But while the discussion that follows uses language familiar from Kant, the observations made are not meant to be exclusive to Kant, still less capturing determinately one rather than another interpretation of Kant, but rather exploring the same cluster of concepts and connections that Kant also recognised – and put to work – in his own moral theory.

Thus the close conceptual connection between autonomy, freedom and independence: to be determining one's own conduct, or the author of one's own actions, is to be free from the direction or coercion of others. In the instance from Xenophon given above, a youth enjoys such independence when he has made the laws of the city his own. The '*nomos*' in autonomy, by asserting that *there is* some principle or law at work, also distinguishes autonomous action from mere reflex. Unlike reflexive or coerced acts, one's acts are properly *one's own* when there is some principle or intention adopted, and the source of the authority for the principle we are following, or the rule we act according to, is oneself and no one else.

Thus autonomy's implicit association with freedom brings the normative idea that adult humans are and ought to be free from their actions being controlled by another human being; and those actions are free which are informed by a principle of one's own determining. Human adults ought to be *self*-determining – otherwise they are subordinate or enslaved to another, and this is an unfortunate and undesirable condition to be in.[10] With self-determination, and the implicit contrast with other-determination, come notions of self-mastery and self-control, so that 'autonomy' captures something important about how individuals relate to their actions. An autonomous action is an action which one is in control of oneself. For this reason, one is thought to be *responsible* for such acts in a distinctive sort of way. When one acts autonomously, there is no one but oneself responsible for that action. This goes deeper than mere forensics. The notion of giving *one's own* law or rule *to oneself, of one's own accord*, also gets at why it would be incoherent to suppose that someone else could be moral for me. I can alienate pretty much every other life function or social role – and if someone else is better at doing it than I am, then perhaps that is what I should do. But I cannot alienate my moral identity. The language of autonomy suggests this is because something only counts as properly moral if it originates in myself, not just as the 'principle of motion' but as the source of authority for the reason or constraint informing the action, and making it the action it is. Moreover, so long as I have the capacity to give myself a rule or law, then I have the responsibility to do so, and failing to do so is a *moral* failing – a defect in *me* – and not just an alternative causation-pathway to the same end.

[10] The self-evident badness of enslavement to another plays an important role in the *Republic* and its working through of the notion of political liberty (see M. Lane, 'Placing Plato in the History of Liberty', *History of European Ideas* 44 (2018), 702–718). That human adults *ought* to be self-determining was perhaps not an equally self-evident notion in all ancient ethical outlooks, and perhaps is nowhere as self-evident as to the modern inheritors of classical Greek ideas. But even Socrates in his autocratic moment of justifying slavery, at *Republic* 590c, concedes that it is *preferable* that one be ruled by *one's own* reason rather than by another's.

In moral discourse, then, 'autonomy' draws together freedom, self-determination, and responsibility; it gives a means of distinguishing between those actions for which we are responsible and those for which we are not, or for which circumstances mitigate responsibility (by blunting the possibility for fully autonomous action); and it does so in a way that explains why evaluations of a person's actions are entitled to be evaluations of the person themselves (they are the *author* of their autonomous actions in a distinctive way), and why it is only one's autonomous actions (or failure to act autonomously when autonomy would have been possible) which are the proper objects of moral evaluation. This is the role played by 'autonomy' and is roughly what must be provided by any alternative concept purporting to do approximately the same conceptual work.

The concept of autonomy itself, however, brings with it familiar difficulties – some already incipient in the foregoing sketch of autonomy's conceptual field. The simplest, most straightforward understanding of self-determination is the one that contrasts *self*-determination with determination by an *other*, by a literally distinct human being. But this is also the understanding which leads to the problematic libertarian understanding of autonomy sketched in the previous section. For if an autonomous action is any action to which I was not literally forced by another person, then any behaviour driven by psychological compulsion or obsession or violent urges, any whimsical or wanton act, any end I set out to accomplish no matter how vile or harmful, counts as autonomous. This is not itself an absurd claim, but it does make it harder to suppose that autonomy is as such *good*.[11]

Autonomy is only *good*, we might say, when the lack of external force is accompanied by obedience to an internal principle – the *nomos* in *autonomos*. This would exclude the wanton and whimsical, but highlight a different area of concern. For even habitual, or what we call 'automatic' actions have some principle or another governing and defining them – it is just of a different sort from an explicit intention. Compulsive actions may themselves be characterised as obedience to a principle. To rule out wanton and whimsical, compulsive and habitual actions from 'autonomous' acts, one must specify some, but not other, internal principles of non-

[11] It is perfectly possible for one to have, and act unimpeded by another on, a desire which is only harmful and hurtful – and the fact that this desire is, at least, 'one's own' does nothing to mitigate the badness of this (indeed, that it *is* one's desire may be precisely what is objectionable). 'Be yourself, no matter who you are' is a silly, romantic, and damaging adage. We only want people to be themselves if they are not vile people. This is not to say that a conception of autonomy *ought* to exclude bad actions from being autonomous actions just by definition – indeed, it could not do this and retain its vital connection to responsibility. But this fact does make the desirability of autonomy so understood ambiguous and conditional.

externally-impeded action as 'truly mine'. The stark clarity of the self/other distinction we started with is made ambiguous and contested. For 'one finds all kinds of multifarious appetites, pleasures, and pains' (*Republic* 431b9–c1) within an individual person. Which of these competing impulses, laying down different principles of action, are 'my own'? Which is the 'I' who is the author and authority of the *nomos?* Am I some one (some kind or subset) but not another of the desires, ends, principles of action I have acquired by the time I am an adult – and if so, what grounds this identification? Am I equally all of the many desires I choose between – in which case, which one is *really* 'me'? simply whichever happens to be 'stronger' than the others at the moment? Or am I somehow something separate from all of this, and a pure chooser, uncharacterised by any one of these aims, goals or values – in which case, how could such 'choice' be anything but arbitrary and illusory?[12]

Scratching the surface of autonomy seems to leave us in danger of more acute unfreedom than the simple coercion of an external force, or else in danger of losing any sense of the self who is supposedly free in autonomous action. The typical response – the necessary response – is somehow to split the multifarious experiences one has into those that are truly one's own and those that are somehow 'foreign', thus internalising the *auto/hetero* distinction.[13] It is the very content of the concept of autonomy, and not just its superficial grammar (and that of its cognates, 'self-control', 'self-rule'), that splits an individual into 'ruler' and 'ruled', 'controller' and 'controlled' – alienating some principles of action as foreign and 'not really me', not 'my own', even though they are happening within the same human *psuche*.[14] Giving content to what it means to act freely where the freedom at issue is freedom from one's own 'alien' impulses or forces, is no easy matter.

It would be absurd to claim that Plato exempts himself from such discussions altogether. Plato is greatly exercised in the *Republic* about what is truly oneself and therefore truly one's own, as well as by the question of *who rules*, by what right and to what effect, as much in

[12] In 'The Idea of Perfection', *Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1970), pp. 1–44, Iris Murdoch offers trenchant critique of this existential notion of self as 'a foot-loose, solitary, substanceless will' (16), particularly as this relates to the extremely problematic notion of 'freedom' it works with.

[13] The need for some such move would have been as evident in antiquity as in modernity. As Lane argues, on text historical grounds, 'the blurring of lines between external and internal subjection… would have been unsurprising to Greeks' of Plato's time, and 'this alone would have made it very difficult for them to draw a sharp distinction between enslavement to an external force and enslavement to an internal one' ('Placing Plato', 705).

[14] This is Kant's solution and language, interpreting non-rational desires as 'heteronomous' – rules or principles given by another, where this 'other' is one's own sensory desires rather than a distinct human being.

psychological as in the political sense.[15] There are resources even in these discussions, however, for seeing Plato as offering an alternative route to the same goods covered by autonomy – one which does not alienate parts of the self as 'not really *me*', but hangs the unity of the self on the identification of the 'true' self as a knower and the authority this grants to its ordering of the whole soul.[16] Plato's alternative, epistemological rendering of the work done by 'autonomy' presents an understanding of the moral domain which – in contrast to the action-centred autonomy views of both contemporary and classical thought – is decisively centred on thought, from which feelings, practical motivations and eventually actions may be taken to flow.[17]

The 'thought' at issue is specifically *knowing* and knowledge-aiming cognition – *not* 'practical reasoning', and having little to do with recognising rules or principles of action.[18] In the *Republic*, at least, what we truly are is *knowers*, and knowers *of reality*. But this is not by contrast with all the non-cognitive elements which are alienated as not 'truly us'. Rather we are fundamentally knowers because knowledge-aiming cognition is what makes it the case that we *are* a single unified *thing* at all. It is by making myself such as to be the author of my thoughts that I become some one being with authority over and responsibility for my feelings and actions. Actions that are properly mine will be those that follow from engaging in thought that is truly my own. The thinking that is truly my own, and which enables me to be good and free from

[15] But he is not always pursuing the same questions in these discussions – for instance, 'doing one's own' operates as a suggested definition of justice in particular in the *Republic,* and is contrasted with doing work that properly belongs to another, rather than with being controlled or determined by another. In 'Placing Plato', Lane offers illuminating discussion of how the *Republic* revises notions of self-mastery, and in the course of this deliberately mixes notions of freedom and obedience.

[16] For instance, it is the unwise person who feeds the non-human multi-headed beast in the soul, in the famous 'image of the soul in words' at the end of Book 9, and alienates the 'human' in the human soul. The one who thinks justice benefits, by contrast, does not alienate the 'non-human' elements in the soul, but rather *domesticates* them, makes them his own, nurturing them into a single community such that 'they will be friends with each other and with himself' (*Rep*. 9.598b5).

[17] In this respect, Iris Murdoch's vision-based, knowledge-oriented ethics ('Vision and Choice in Morality', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society,* suppl. vol. 30 (1956), 32–58) are genuinely Platonic. I explore this characteristic of Plato's ethics in more detail in 'Ideals and Ethical Formation: Confessions of a Buddhist-Platonist', in C. Coseru (ed.) *Reasons and Empty Persons*: *Mind, Metaphysics, and Morality: Essays in Honor of Mark Siderits* (Dordrecht: Springer 2023), pp. 387–415.

[18] Nor indeed with 'perceiv[ing] and pursu[ing] what is genuinely beneficial in human life' (N. D. Smith, 'What is Liberty For? Plato and Aristotle on Political Freedom', *Skepsis* 12 (2001), 78–94, 82), but rather with knowing intelligible reality as such. To return to this knowledge-based conception of the authority of reason would be, according to Kant, a decided step backwards into the dark old days of dogmatism (see Susan Neiman, *The Unity of Reason* (Oxford University Press, 1994)). I intend to diffuse this worry by focusing closely on the effects of knowledge, as Plato defines it, on the soul, and the mechanisms of seeking such knowledge and *their* effects on the soul.

'determination by another' is knowing and knowledge-seeking – specifically understood as seeking, having, giving and defending *logoi* of *ousia*.

In what follows, I aim to show that it is having and seeking knowledge as defined in the central books of the *Republic* that bestows the freedom and responsibility associated with 'autonomy' in moral discourse. Such knowing – the ability to give, follow and defend accounts or explanations of the being of things – is prior to action. It is good not just in itself, but also for the beneficial effect it has on the soul of the knower – in particular, the effect of freeing the soul from bedazzlement by appearances, particularly pleasant and flattering or unpleasant and fearsome appearances.[19] Having, or even progressing towards having, such a power to explain makes the character of the one with that power such as to be responsible for their thoughts, and therefore for their feelings and actions. Ability to give accounts is what makes one accountable.

1.3. True Knowledge

What is the cognitive capacity that is or entails self-mastery, and without which we are enslaved and unfree? After reviewing the claim that reason's constitutive task, in the *Republic* (and in the *Philebus*), is to know – rather than, say, to deliberate – I then go on to investigate what this perfect knowing actually consists in. What is the knowledge that sets us free?

I have argued in detail elsewhere that the *Philebus* offers a hierarchically structured portrait of cognition according to which the domain of cognition is defined by reference to a shared aim – namely, perfect knowledge – and modes of cognition within that domain are ranked according to how nearly they approximate this full and perfect knowledge.[20] In contexts concerned to

[19] 'Perfect Knowledge and its Affects' (Carpenter in J. Jirsa, F. Karfik and Š. Špinka (eds.) *Plato's Philebus* (Prague: OIKOYMENH, 2017), pp. 208–229) focuses similarly on the effects on the soul of striving for knowledge, but in the *Philebus* rather than the *Republic*.

[20] Carpenter 'Ranking Knowledge in Plato's *Philebus*', *Phronesis* 60 (2015), 180–205. I argue for this more briefly with respect to *Republic,* Book 5 in particular, in 'Judging Strives to be Knowing' in L. Brisson and N. Notomi (eds.) *Plato's Republic: Proceedings of the IXth Symposium Platonicum* (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2012–13), pp. 262-266. This understanding of Plato's epistemology puts him squarely in the tradition that R. Pasnau calls 'idealised epistemology' ('Epistemology Idealised', *Mind* 122/488 (2013), 987–1021; and *After Certainty* (Oxford University Press 2017)), where the central epistemological question concerns the finest cognitive state or condition. W. Schwab, 'Plato's Ideal Epistemology', in S. Hetherington and N. D. Smith (eds.) *What the Ancients Offer to Ideal Epistemology* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 86–105 makes the case for understanding Plato's epistemology generally in this way.

distinguish it, Plato often uses *epistēmē* for this most perfect form of cognition,[21] and I will use *epistēmē* for this purpose here, along with the imperfect English term 'knowledge'.

What I will not argue for in detail here – though I am glad to have an ally in Bosanquet on this point – is that the condensed trajectory of *Philebus* 55c–59d is paralleled in expanded form in the *Republic*'s epistemology, which takes the same paradeigmatist approach to knowledge.[22] Unfolding over several pages from V.478 (the Lovers of Sights & Sounds passage) to VII.536 (the education of philosophers in Kallipolis), is a cohesive, inter-referential account of what knowledge is and why it enjoys the sort of priority Socrates claims for it. Here in the *Republic*, as in the *Philebus*, the aim of all cognition – constituting it as such – is not mere truth but knowledge in its most exact and complete form. From its first introduction as a separate power (*dunamis*) at 477b, judging (*doxazein,* opining, supposing) and its products, *doxai,*[23] are not merely inferior to *epistēmē* because they are sometimes true and sometimes false; they are generally doing less well what *epistēmē* does perfectly – they are less stable, less precise, less clear and in all respects less completely and perfectly knowledge-like.

This already begins to answer the substantial question of what knowing consists in. As well as being, of course, correct (unmistaken, *anamartētōi*, 477e7) or true, knowledge is clearer (*phanoteron*, 478c13; *saphesteron*, 511c4),[24] most precise (*akribestata*, 484c8), and reliable or

[21] Though of course his terminology is famously unstable. The *Philebus* uses *epistēmē*, later conjoined with or assimilated to *dialektikē*. The *Republic* frequently uses *epistēmē,* which it then associates with *dialegesthai* and *dialektikē*; but at the end of *Republic* V, for instance, *gnō*–words are used both before (*gnōsin*, 476c2, e.g.) and after (484c–d) the deployment of *epistēmē* as the power contrasted with the power of *doxa*, and the verb *eidenai* is also used (e.g. 531e). While *noēsis* is used at first to name the highest form of cognition in Book 6 (511d8), in Book 7 Socrates labels that same thing *epistēmē* (533e4), reserving *noēsis* for cognition of the intelligible generally, both perfect and imperfect (534a2), and claims that these are the names they agreed before (533e3). J. Moss also 'for convenience [chooses] '*epistēmē*' and *'doxa*' to label the superior and inferior kinds' of cognition in Plato (*Plato's Epistemology: Being and Seeming* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press 2021), p. 1 n2).

[22] B. Bosanquet notes several points of connection between this stretch of the *Republic* (478–536) and the *Philebus*, and suggests specifically an echo of the *Republic*'s segmenting of cognition (509d, the 'divided line' passage) in the *Philebus'* 61e description of its preceding epistemology in terms of 'segments' (*A Companion to Plato's Republic for English Readers* (New York, NY: Macmillan & Co., 1895), p. 250). At 259–262, he draws a more precise and detailed parallel between *Republic* 6 (509–511)/7 (533–34) and *Philebus* 55d–59d, concerning the winnowing of purer forms of cognition and their respective ordering.

[23] Setting aside its whiggish Aristotelianising, I am in agreement with J. Moss and W. Schwab ('The Birth of Belief', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 57 (2019), 1–32) that more is lost than gained by translating *doxa* as belief; judging/judgement or opining/opinion are less bad but still inadequate alternatives. For this discussion, I mostly leave it untranslated.

[24] The text also appeals to clarity in the negative mode, via what is more or less obscure, as in 'when [the soul] focuses on what is mixed with obscurity, on what comes to be and passes away, it judges and is dimmed' (508d5–7); compare *skotōi* here (508d6) with *skotōdesteron* of Book 5 (478c14). The contrast is explicit at 479d.

stable (*pagiōs,* 479c4; *bebaiōsētai,* 533d1). These are not arbitrary or fungible terms of praise, for this trio is repeated with care in the corresponding passage of the *Philebus*. Moreover, in both discussions, cognitions can only have all of these qualities – be both correct *and* determinate, precise *and* stable – when their objects are themselves stable and unambiguous.[25] Thus *Republic* VII talks of 'turning the soul' (518c–d, 519a, 521c, 533d) from one sort of object (those which become) to another sort (those which are).[26]

But the expanded account in the *Republic* offers more detailed description of the work done (*apergazetai*, 477d2) by the power (*dunamis*) of knowing, eventually specifying it as the ability to give and defend complete accounts of being, and even giving some detail (though not as much as we get in the *Phaedo*) about what those accounts must be like.[27] The categorical distinction introduced in *Republic* V, between knowing (which is only of being) and *doxa* (which is only of what is between being and non-being) is picked up (507b–c, 509d5) in the Divided Line passage (509d6–511e5) of Book 6, and made more refined. The objects of each power are identified as 'intelligibles' and 'sensibles', respectively (507c; 509d), and now degrees of success are allowed in cognition of each sort of object, according to the work accomplished. In each domain, the superior sort of cognitive engagement is distinguished from the inferior within that domain by its *examination* of appearances, rather than the acceptance of them. The epitome of this examining activity, of not accepting what appears as given, is the highest form of cognition, *epistēmē*, or even 'the knowledge of dialectic' (511c5) or 'the power of dialectic' (511b3). It is fitting that *epistēmē* should here be specified as 'dialectical', or assimilated to dialectic, for only at this point in the description of ideal cognition do we learn that true cognitive success takes no hypothesis as granted, and so must indeed consist in

[25] *epamphoterizousin,* 479b10. Unambiguous is an odd term to put to ontological use, but this seems to be how it operates in the passage, which concerns the children's riddle and such parlour games. The force of it seems to be that the object itself is such as to elude determinate cognition.

[26] While the *Philebus* simply asserts that 'fixed and pure and true and what we call unalloyed knowledge has to do with the things which are eternally the same without change or mixture, or with that which is most akin to them; and all other things are to be regarded as secondary and inferior' (*Phlb.* 59c), the *Republic* gives us something like an argument, in the contested passage at the end of Book V, where Socrates distinguishes the true lover of knowledge from the facsimile of such. Moss, *Plato's Epistemology*, emphasises this object condition on knowledge – at the expense, in my view, of the always correlated activity condition, or what is called the 'work done' by the power of knowing.

[27] The *Philebus* is not absolutely without interest in the activity of perfect cognition, for it describes it (under the name *dialektikē*) as 'the *dunamis* of the soul to love truth and do everything for its sake' (*Phlb.* 58d4–5); but it is not further examined. See next note.

dialegesthai, multi-faceted but unified discussion rather than deduction.[28] Geometers, generally an archetype of cognitive success, become here only so-called knowers,[29] because 'making these [claims] their hypotheses, do not deem it necessary to give any account [*logos*] of them either to themselves or to others' (510c6–d1) – giving an account being flagged at 498a5 as 'the most difficult' part of philosophy. The security or reliability of perfect knowledge stems, then, not just from the stability of its objects, but also from the completeness of the explanations one is able to give. For the geometers' deficiency is not that they have got the wrong kind of objects in view; it is rather what they *do* with respect to such objects that is inadequate. They allow some things to remain unaccounted for; they fail to even attempt to give a full and complete explanation or *logos,* or to 'reach the end of the intelligible',[30] in cases where such an account is indeed possible.

Knowing as a cognitive capacity, a *dunamis* of the soul (537d6), is then the power to give complete accounts of the being of intelligible reality, the only thing liable to such an account. These accounts are 'of what each being is' (534b3–4) – they are *not* explanations of principles of action or reasons for choice, but of reality. Where there is no such ability, there is no knowledge.

> And you would say that one who does not have this [grasp of the being of a thing], insofar as they are not able to give an account either to themselves or to another, to that extent they lack understanding (*noun*) of it? (*Rep*. 534b4–6)?[31]

Since the accounts at issue rest on no unexamined premises, the capacity to give such an account is also the power to *defend* that account 'through all interrogation' (534c1b), for one is capable of articulating this account without appeal to unaccounted for propositions liable to give way under challenge, with mastery of the explanatory connections at work borne of such thorough examination of all presumptions. These accounts being devoid of unexplained hypotheses, the

[28] In the *Philebus*, by contrast, this identification of *dialektikē* as the highest form of *epistēmē* pops out of nowhere (see Protarchus' perplexity, *Philebus* 57e8), because that discussion does not devote attention to spelling out the *logos*-requirement on knowledge.
[29] At 511c6, geometry and the like are demoted to 'what are called *technai';* reiterated at 533d4–6: 'Out of habit, we have often called these knowledges (*epistēmas*), but they need another name, clearer than *doxa*, darker than knowledge'.
[30] 'In the same way, whenever someone tries by dialectic – through argument and apart from all sense perceptions – to set out each thing as it is, and does not let it drop until he grasps the good itself with understanding itself, he reaches the end of the intelligible, just as the other reached the end of the visible' (*Rep.* 532a5–b2).
[31] See also 531e3–4: 'Does it seem to you they will ever know anything at all of the things we say they must know, without the ability to give and follow an account?'

only possible method is a dialectical one (*dialektikē methodos*, 533c8), and the perfect form of the knowing is accordingly the *power to discuss* (*dialegesthai dunameōs*, 532d8, *dialegesthai dunamis*, 533a7).

Further, since such accounts 'do away with hypotheses and proceed to the first principle' (*Rep*. 533c6–d1), the search for knowledge also pushes towards unity – towards grasping the coherence and relatedness both within and between areas of inquiry (531c9–d3). For hypotheses are explained by being integrated within a systematic explanatory whole, and only the unity of the whole could ground the explanatory unity within any part. Thus knowledge requires one to 'form a unified vision of the kinship [of separately known things] both with one another and with the nature of that which is' (537c1–3); and again 'whoever can achieve a unified vision is dialectical, and whoever cannot is not' (537c6–7).

This drive towards unity is epitomised in what Socrates calls 'the greatest' and most appropriate thing for philosopher-rulers in training to learn, namely the form of the Good. The Good itself is a supremely intelligible object (508e3), and the terminus of knowledge (532b). Thus our primary task with respect to the Good is to know it, and all of our knowing of anything aims also thereby at this. The Good is the end of our knowledge-aiming endeavours in another way, for it 'supplies truth to the knowables and renders [*apodidon*, 508e1] to the knower the power to know' (508d10–e2). That is to say, the Good is the source or 'cause [*aitian*] of knowledge and of truth' (508e2–3) – of the *intelligibility* of reality, which is to say its amenability to a complete explanatory account which is maximally clear, precise, and unified so as to be secure against error; and of the *intelligence* in us, our ability to recognise measure, proportion, aptness, precision and clarity when it is there.[32] This means that whatever other content there may be to the form of the Good, every act of knowing anything (better) is an act of knowing the good (better) *as* the cause of the intelligibility itself; and indeed, conversely, at least as Socrates presents it here, our primary (perhaps only) mode of accessing the Good Itself is through this very activity of working through an increasingly clear, coherent, comprehensive and integrated explanatory account of reality.[33] On this reading 'knowing [*epistaimetha*] other things as much

[32] For *apodidōmi* LSJ also offer as a possible meaning 'give an account or definition of a thing, explain it', so perhaps the claim is that the form of the Good explains or grounds the power of the knower to know.

[33] At least the text does not give us any other. Plato makes Socrates irritatingly coy on the topic of the Good: he is explicitly *not* sharing with us, he says, all of his considered thoughts on the matter (506d7–8). Yet the indirect and metaphorical discussion of the Good we do get is conducted almost entirely in epistemic terms – even its metaphysics are relayed as relevant to cognition (the good is the cause of *knowables*, *gignōskomenois*, 508d10); it gives off rays of *truth* [506d4] as the sun gives rays of light).

as possible is of no benefit to us' (505a6–7) without knowing (*ismen*, 505a6; *phronein*, b1, b2) the good because such a cognitive condition would not be the fullest knowledge possible, or knowledge in its fullest sense.[34] *All* knowing properly so called is unified, as an activity and (because of the kind of activity this is) in its content, by this aim.

This, then, is true knowledge – the knowledge, I claim, that sets us free. The question is, how knowledge so understood could do this, and in what sense we are then 'free'. In particular, does perfect knowing enable us to be free in the sense of self-determining, responsible for ourselves, able to be the authors of our thoughts and actions and as such be accountable for them to others? And if so, *how*? For it is a striking feature of such ideal knowledge that it is conspicuously *impractical*. It seems it would not even be possible to come to know the way to Larissa in this fashion (letting that stand for any ordinary practical goal) and even if one could, this would hardly yield an improvement in one's ability actually to get where one is going.

In order to see how ideal knowledge of reality could articulate largely the same concepts and concerns ordinarily understood by autonomy – so that the good of being a knower might claim to occupy the space typically occupied by the good of being autonomous – I will focus in what follows on what seeking to become a knower does to the person seeking. Aiming to acquire such a power as Plato's *epistēmē* is, I will argue, involves activities and enacted commitments to values which fundamentally shape and alter one's character and overall psychological condition for the better. In particular, it makes us answerable for our thoughts, words and deeds, as well as free from inappropriate determination of these, in just the way autonomy is meant to capture. Aiming to be able to give accounts of the right kind and on our own makes us accountable to others, and enables us to think, feel and act in ways that are truly our own.

1.4. The Activity and Effects of Having and Seeking Knowledge

To begin, consider how the framing and conduct of the epistemological discussion in the *Republic* invite us to attend to what seeking and having knowledge consists in as something one does, rather than as a thing or possession. The exposition of ideal knowledge begins by classing

[34] The Good, then, is written into any knowledge as such – whether because any proper knowing incorporates understanding of the Good as a separate element (as cause of an object, it must be known in order to know the object in a way that leaves no hypothesis unargued), or because grasping reality *as* an integrated, intelligible whole just is to grasp the Good (the epistemic aspect of the T. Irwin's view in *Plato's Ethics* (Oxford University Press 1995), pp. 272–73, or M. M. McCabe in *Plato's Individuals* (Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 72).

it as a power, underscoring that powers are what enable us to do whatever we can do (477c). Knowing (and its inferior relatives) are characterised as *dunameis* several times in the following three pages, and at later points in the development of the epistemology.[35] This power of the soul (537d6) to *do* something is specifically defined by the work it does (*apergazetai*), and not just by its objects (477d2).[36] This framing highlights that the epistemological discussion that follows is concerned with knowledge *as an activity of soul*. Thus the Divided Line passage, does not simply class more finely differentiated kinds of knowledge by object, but instead differentiates them according to what a soul or a person *does*. 'The soul uses images…to investigate' (510b5) or else 'goes from hypotheses' (511b7) to a first principle in order to 'make its investigations' (510b8); geometers 'hypothesise' and 'go from these principles'; knowers use hypotheses as stepping stones (511b). This preference for verbal forms appears in the very first question posed to persuade the imagined lovers of sights and sounds – 'Does the one who knows know something or nothing?' (476e7); it persists throughout (e.g. *epistaimetha,* 505a6; *ismen*, 505a6; *phronein*, 505b1, b2), particularly when ideal and deficient cognition are under discussion – knowing or failing to are consistently described in terms of what one does (or fails to do) rather than, or in addition to, in terms of what one has (or fails to have) as 'contents' in one's mind. In Book 7, the verbal form of *dialegesthai* occurs repeatedly – for instance, 'the song dialectic sings' as Grube has it, is the *nomos hon to dialgesthai perainei* (532a1–2)*, '*the melody discussing [or, practising dialectic] performs' when one tries to grasp something through *dialegesthai* (532a6). This active aspect is further emphasised by recalling and conjoining the original dynamic characterisation of knowledge with *dialegesthai dunamis* (511b3; 532d8 and 533a7).

Next, consider how the text further invites us to attend specifically to the effects on the soul of engaging in such activity. Much of Book 4 – that is, what intervenes between the initial introduction of knowledge as a power, and its further refinement in the Divided Line – in conducted in terms of souls, philosophic and unphilosophic, and the various effects on them of being thwarted by circumstance (490c–497a), or outlines what circumstances would conduce to a more favourable development of the soul (498a–e; 500a–e). The Cave Allegory is specifically introduced under the injunction to 'compare *the effect on our nature of education*

[35] E.g. 518c5; 532a3 on analogy with sight; in verbal forms in this context, for instance, at 533c3 (being able to give accounts). The geometers of 511b–c are discussed in terms of what they are able and unable to do.

[36] In the acknowledged difficulty of getting a precise rendering of *apergazomai*, it is interesting to note its use in the 'function argument' of Book 1 (four times in 353a–e). There too it is specifically sight and hearing that are given as examples (among others) of things that are defined by the work they do.

[*paideias*] and the lack of education' (514a1–2, emphasis mine) – to examine, that is, the effects not of the *paideia* of a child's stories and games (522a–b) but of a full cognitive development toward the perfect cognition which has just been schematically outlined in the Divided Line passage (509d–511e), and will be further elaborated for the next twenty pages. This is in part paying the debt incurred in Book 4, where the descriptions of the virtues left wisdom woefully under-described (*Rep*. 497c–d). But the debt is payed now as part of the evidence that genuine philosophers should rule, and that evidence takes the form of the effects on the soul of aiming at true knowledge. For instance, seeking the whole of truth and genuine knowledge 'cleanses and rekindles' that in the soul which has been 'blinded and destroyed by other pursuits' (527d8–e2). The process of aiming at knowledge – knowledge of any fully knowable thing (it is specific studies in the educational curriculum under discussion at 527d–e) – has an improving effect on the whole soul. In particular, as the cave imagery so vividly brings out, seeking knowledge is *freeing*; inquiry of the right kind is the solvent that breaks the bonds ('*desmos'* three times in 514a–b alone) that keep us in a condition of unfreedom.

To see how knowing might claim this effect, and what indeed such freedom is and what other related effects knowing might have, we return to what the activity of knowing consists in. Naturally it consists in 'turning towards' reality, having real being as the object of one's cognition. But real being is itself defined in terms of its intelligibility, of its liability to be cognised by a maximally clear and precise cognition, a shareable and articulable cognition, reliable in virtue of its explanatory role and relations, which explanation or *logos* is itself graspable in an articulable way, clearly, precisely and without ambiguity. Sensations are none of those things: they are not explicable, shareable, or cognitively reliable; they are not themselves capable of the measuring that grounds sharability and defensibility, nor of the precision and clarity knowing demands. Sensibles, insofar as they are sensible, are not knowable: 'If anyone attempts to learn something about sensible things, whether by gaping upward or squinting downward, I'd claim – since there's no knowledge of such things – that he never learns anything'.[37] Thus to seek knowledge is first of all to 'turn away from' sensibles.

[37] 529b6–c1. W. Schwab's 'Understanding *Epistēmē* in Plato's *Republic*' (*Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 51 (2016), 41–86, offers detailed argument for there being no *epistēmē* of perceptibles. Gail Fine's well-known position (in 'Knowledge and Belief in *Republic* V', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 60 (1978), 121–39, and 'Knowledge and Belief' in S. Everson (ed.) *Republic* V–VII', *Companions to Ancient Thought 1: Epistemology* (Cambridge University Press 1990), pp. 85–115) that the epistemology of the *Republic* allows for the knowability of sensibles does not engage with this passage. Katja Vogt offers trenchant criticism of Fine's view as well as arguments in favour of a non-overlapping of the 'proper objects' of *doxa* (sensibles) and of knowledge (intelligibles), in *Belief and*

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'Turning away from' sensibles means specifically not relying on or trusting them cognitively – one does not rely on sensibles in building coherent, connected views of what things really are, and one does not trust that sensibles are as they seem. Seeking knowledge as an activity or practice is a training in valuing some things over others; *viz*., accuracy over convenience, clarity over comfort, reliability over attractiveness, truth over pleasure, consistency and coherence and explanatorines over obscurity and arbitrariness. It is a discipline in preferring and pursuing coherence and unity over disjointedness.[38] So long as one's activity is that of seeking knowledge in the robust sense defined here in *Republic* V–VII (and in the *Philebus*), one is *enacting* the appreciation of and preference for precisely these goods, at the expense of others which are left to atrophy (485d) or are actively treated as insignificant or worthless.

That is to say, insofar as one is actively seeking to know, one allows the constitutive characteristics of perfect knowing – clarity, coherence, articulability, precision – to be the standard by which one measures one's experiences generally. It is *insofar as one values knowing* that sensible experience is deficient, is not particularly fascinating (contrary to the sight-lovers of Book 5), because it is not something that can deliver answers to one's questions; nor are its deliverances, particularly sensation's reports on 'good' and 'bad' in the form of pleasures and pains, to be trusted.[39] Thus the activity of seeking to know turns the attention away from 'feasting, greed, and other such pleasures' (519b1–2), not simply by offering a distraction but by engaging one in a practice that devalues such things, and implements alternative standards and values. In seeking knowledge, one values the norms constitutive of knowing; feasting and so on may show up – but they show up in the light of the norms of knowing as unimportant and uninteresting. Education – the process of acquiring perfect knowledge – is an exercise in acquiring standards which fix the criteria of evaluation and selection of *all* one's experiences, which is why it is not 'putting sight into blind eyes' but a

Truth: A Skeptic Reading of Plato (New York, NY: Oxford University Press 2012), pp. 55–62. For positive arguments for the epistemic inferiority of sensibles, see McCabe's *Plato's Individuals,* esp. Ch. 2; and for their ontological inferiority implying epistemic inferiority, see Moss *Plato's Epistemology,* which also offers a strong 'distinct objects' interpretation of Plato's epistemology.

[38] In the *Philebus*, knowledge makes a life good not because it enables us to better maximise pleasure, but because it is a matter of our minds being turned towards (as the *Republic* puts it) measure, proportion and fittingness. Love of knowledge is a practice in loving and valuing precision, accuracy, clarity, reliability and truth. And it is this that makes our lives better and good, and makes our pleasures proportionate, measured and beautiful.

[39] The grounds of this mistrust are put most explicitly in the *Phaedo*: 'the soul of every man, when it feels intense pleasure or pain in connection with something, necessarily believes at the same time that what causes such feelings must be most clear and most true, which it is not' (*Phd.* 83c5–8); 'every pleasure and every pain' makes the soul 'believe that truth is what the body says it is' (*Phd.* 83d4, 6–7).

turning of 'the whole soul' (518c1–2, c8). Plato highlights the valuing implicit in knowledge-seeking by having Socrates describe the paradigmatic knowledge-seeker, the philosophical nature, as having an affection for truth (*alētheian stergein*, 485c4) and abhoring falsehood (485c3–4), and as learning- or knowledge-loving (*philomatheias*, 499e2; *cf*. 485b1, d3), emphasising that this love is for the whole of truth (475b–c).

This love for the whole of truth changes the whole soul. For knowledge demands integrated unity – giving a defensible, clear and precise account of any being (any real, intelligible item) requires establishing consistency and coherence between one's various truth-apt cognitions without distinction, making knowledge-aiming a global affair. And truth-apt cognitions related to sensibles cannot be immune to this requirement to cohere with each other and with non-sensory cognitions in an explanatory, knowledge-aiming way. At the same time, the very demand that they be so integrated highlights their inherent limitation in this respect – sense-based truth-apt cognitions are as such less clear, less liable to be amenable to a precise and unambiguous account. The demand for coherence thus reveals that sense-based cognitions are, as a class, not to be trusted or relied upon, so that aiming at knowledge changes our relation to and evaluation of sense-cognitions as such. This in turn bears on the pleasures, pains, desires and aversions associated with such sense-based cognitions. These too are unreliable and not to the point (the point being to attain knowledge), and become fundamentally uninteresting and unpersuasive. In this way knowledge-seeking involves the *whole* soul being oriented towards knowing intelligible reality, thus freeing it from being led by whims and desires for pleasure, idleness, and comfort.

Such a comprehensive effect on the soul arises only, the *Republic* makes clear, when knowledge is genuinely functioning as the final or ultimate end – 'provided that one practises it for the sake of knowing rather than for trade' (525d2–3).[40] Sensation and its values – pleasure, pain, novelty, entertainment – are only retrained and reconfigured when we aim at knowledge for its own sake, holding its values and standards in higher esteem than any other. If one studies knowables such as mathematics 'like tradesmen and retailers, for the sake of buying and selling' (525c3–4), it will not reorient the whole soul. For after all, the tradesman has his eye on the bottom line, and only values knowledge and its constitutive norms insofar as this is useful for increasing profit and pleasure. When knowledge is pursued out of ambition for material gain or honour,

[40] As do the geometers, who although 'they speak like practical men…, the entire subject is pursued for the sake of knowledge' (*Rep*. 527a7–10), and in particular 'knowledge of what always is, not what comes into being and passes away' (527b4–5).

say, or to revenge an enemy or to discharge a debt, one *de facto* instrumentalises the values implicitly practised and enacted in coming to know, leaving one's wider set of motivations untouched.

This attention to the pursuit of knowledge for the wrong reasons highlights knowledge-seeking *as a practice in valuing*. Knowing is not just something we do; knowing and aiming to know is a teleological process we actively engage in and, in so engaging, acknowledge the authority of its constitutive values. It turns the whole soul only because it engages the whole soul and holds all of it to the highest cognitive standards – one of those standards itself being the coherent, explanatory unity of cognition. Practising different values would have different effects on the soul, and practising the wrong values cannot be expected to have a beneficial effect. Seeking knowledge (in the right way, for the right reasons) is as much a practice and enactment of the love of truth, precision and explanation as having it is, so that seeking it, and not just having it, will be beneficial – and beneficial to the degree to which one seeks, and approximates to perfect knowledge, for no ulterior purpose.

This should flesh out Socrates' claim that 'No one whose thoughts are truly directed towards the things that are has the leisure to look down at human affairs or to be filled with envy and hatred by competing with people' (500b8–c3) with something rather fuller than the uncertain observation that no one can 'be in the company of what he admires without imitating it' (500c7). The foregoing reflections suggest that it is not just sheer admiration of the objects studied, 'in orderly array, always the same, neither doing injustice to one another nor suffering it' (500c3–5) that affects the philosophers' soul; more concretely, the cognitive activity of attempting to know such things, the necessary willingness implicit in this to be governed by cognitive norms and cognitive standards in one's evaluations, has an ordering effect on the soul, as well as the dampening effect on desires that would disrupt that order.

This discipline of subordinating desires and inclinations for lesser goods, and governing oneself by the demands of ideal knowledge has an edifying effect on the soul, whatever the knowable object one has in view. *Whatever* 'compels the soul to study being' is a fit object for educating a soul into cognitive perfection, and has an improving and unifying effect on the soul, while whatever 'compels it to study becoming is inappropriate' (526e7–8).[41] Aiming to 'know'

[41] The context here is specifically what conduces to knowing the form of the Good. But if it belongs to knowledge properly understood that it has the Good as its ultimate object, then we may say that the edifying effects are caused as much by the Good as by what knowledge is – and if ultimately by the Good, it is *via* its roles as a knowable ultimate end of all knowing; as the cause of the intelligibility of

sensibles could not transform the soul in the relevant way, since that project could not be an exercise in valuing precision, articulability and explanatoriness above all else. But aiming to know clearly a comprehensive defensible account of whatever does admit of such cognition practises the subordination of the whole of the soul's motivations to the values of knowing.

Education, understood as aiming at knowledge, transforms the *whole* soul, and not just the intellect. Turning the keen-sighted but gluttonous soul towards being is something more, and more specific, than giving the glutton something other than food to think about. No doubt seeking to know the good occupies one's mind in a better way than seeking to consume the most food, say, or experience the widest variety of flavours. But the improvement of the soul through learning is not presented as one in which moral ends (temperance) are substituted for immoral ends (gluttony). It is not so much the content of the knowledge of pure mathematics and theoretical astronomy that makes the difference, but rather what the process of acquiring content of that sort does to us. Turning towards being generally, with the aim to come to know, is improving just because of the motivational order of priorities imposed on the soul when actually put into practice. The clever glutton (or the base but clever person generally, 519a2) who turns towards knowing enacts a practice – one which only she can enact – of subordinating her keen wit to the values of full and perfect knowing, namely precision and clarity in systematic explanation which can be defended against robust rational critique. The continuous, enacted subordination of the values of sensation, measuring their deliverances and desirability by the standards of knowing, makes gustatory pleasures less attractive, less enticing, leading to less gluttonous behaviour. It is the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake that dispels the power of the senses to hold us in thrall.

Because the mechanism of the transformation of soul is the activity of valuing implicit in seeking knowledge correctly, such transformation only follows upon actual engagement in seeking knowledge. Having facts conveyed to one, and being able to repeat them faithfully, does no good (think of Apollodorus in the *Symposium*). One must engage one's own cognitions and evaluations in the process of making oneself able to articulate a coherent, accurate account and defend it against critique. The importance of this active involvement of the inquirer in the inquiry is expressed in different ways across different dialogues;[42] in the *Republic*, it manifests

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any knowable object; and as determining what perfect knowledge is. Thus the Good may be the source of whatever is beneficial in knowledge, while knowledge of other intelligible objects such as justice and beauty, or even mathematics and logic, may itself be edifying.

[42] In the so-called 'Socratic' dialogues, this appears as the 'say what you think' requirement on *elenchus* (G. Vlastos, 'The Socratic Elenchus: Method is All', *Socratic Studies* (Cambridge University Press,

in the absence of any formula for dialectic, where 'dialectic' names the highest or ideal cognitive condition. Being able to get through the cross-examination in defending an account requires that one be so much in command of the explanatory connections between things that whatever direction critique may come from, one can see how to respond appropriately. Such command is not to be had by any other means than actually knowing how to explain the matter oneself. On this view, knowing is not valuable *because* it is mine or comes from me; 'mineness' does not make it good, even conditionally. Rather, knowing is valuable and has beneficial effects on the soul; but because of what *knowing* is (*viz.,* a practice in valuing of a specific sort), knowledge can only be had first-hand. Knowing in its proper sense is something each must do for themselves, and it is being *auto-logizomenos* – such as to be able to give accounts oneself – which brings further benefits to the soul.

The *Republic*'s characterisation of ideal cognition as dialectic makes clear that it is the same thing that simultaneously requires one's own involvement *and* makes one beholden to public standards of rationality. For *dialectic* is a representation of ideal knowing that explicitly ties one's accounts to their intelligibility to others. In case the root meaning of 'dialogue' in dialectic did not make this inter-personal accountability clear enough, Socrates underscores it by representing dialectical accomplishment as the ability to defend accounts *against all interrogation* (*pantōn elegchōn,* 534c1). Interrogation is primarily an interpersonal activity of people holding each other to account. That is, in striving to know, one must engage one's own cognitive efforts comprehensively in a project of holding the results of those efforts to publicly evaluable standards. Recognising the legitimacy of such interrogation by others is itself part of the values built into the project of striving to know as knowledge is defined in the *Republic*.[43]

Knowing, of the sort that is liberating, is something one must do oneself, valuing epistemic goods for their own sake and allowing these authority in ordering and evaluating the whole of one's mental life. It liberates one, as the cave allegory indicates, from the capriciousness and

1993), pp. 1–37, at 8–10) or perhaps its close cousin, the Doxastic Constraint (H. Benson, *Socratic Wisdom: The Model of Knowledge in Plato's Early Dialogues* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 37–43); in the *Meno*, we see it not only in Socrates' suggestion Meno leave Gorgias aside and say what he himself thinks (*Meno* 71d), but also in the metaphor of 'recollection' and Socrates' insistence in the demonstration with the slave that the slave think through and accept each step for himself, so that in the end all of the *doxa* expressed were *his own* (*Meno* 85b8–9); the *Theaetetus* uses the metaphor of *maieusis* and has Socrates claim that his interlocutors 'discover in themselves a multitude of beautiful things' (*Tht*. 150d7–8).

[43] Sense-perception could never be the sort of thing answerable to this sort of interrogation – it has no *logos* which could be held up to scrutiny by others. If something looks or feels thus-and-so to me, there is no cross-examination which could expose that look or feel as anything other than its appearance to me.

false values of sense-perception and related desires and fears in particular, and also from the capriciousness and false values of a social order ignorant of real goodness and the values of knowing reality – and it does this not by alienating one part of oneself in favour of another, but by shaping and coordinating otherwise disparate impulses under the authority of a coherent set of values. Knowing is an activity *by definition* committed to articulability, and to answerability to public critique. The literal ability to respond grounds the knower's responsibility, for it is by making oneself such as to be able to respond to interrogation that one's soul becomes such as to respond appropriately to sensory stimuli and enticements, by creating a unity in one's soul which incorporates, rather than alienates, one's various impulses and aims. One is thus responsible for one's overall emotional and evaluative states, for they are the result of one's concerted pursuit of knowledge for its own sake; and one is thus able to act responsibly on this basis.

In all these ways true or ideal knowing, and seeking it, plays the functional role of autonomy: it is an activity by which one is simultaneously free, in the sense of being in charge of oneself and the author of one's own actions, and accountable to others. One is here literally accountable, in owing an account liable to rational scrutiny, but without this implying one is thereby (or instead) beholden to unexamined social prejudices and norms or customs (*nomoi*). Similarly, responsibility for one's thoughts, evaluations, feelings and actions has been articulated without relying on reflexive notions which invite logical perplexities, or require that one alienate some part of oneself as not the 'real me'.

1.5. Account-giving, Accountability, and Autonomy

The concept of *autonomia* has two sorts of connotations that make it unsuitable for Plato's purposes in the *Republic*, in spite of that dialogue's enthusiasm for mingling political and personal concepts in mutually informative ways.

First, it suggests that there is something about being customary, or something about being 'mine', or something about being 'my own custom' that makes something good. But neither the fact that something is customary, nor the fact that the custom happens to be my own, gives anything ultimate normative force. In fact, on the contrary, it is an important part of the response to Cephalus and Polemarchus in Book 1, and to Adeimantus' and Glaucon's challenge in Book 2, that we learn to recognise that customs as such do not ensure correctness or worth – even if

the customs are *mine,* or those of *my* community. And the fact that something comes from me or is done by me, in any ordinary sense of it, does not of itself grant worth.

Nor indeed does it grant freedom. This is the second difficulty with *autonomia*. Thrasymachus' provocative presentation of the powerful in Book 1, like the Calliclean picture of natural justice in the *Gorgias* which it echoes, makes clear the need to think more carefully about freedom – in particular, to consider whether 'turning whatever way one wants' (*Rep.* 520a2) or 'license to do as one wants' (*Rep*. 557b5–6) is in fact freedom or not. 'How', Callicles asks (*Gorgias* 491e5–6), 'can a man be happy while enslaved to anyone at all', including himself? Behind the logical paradoxes of self-reflexivity, glancingly raised and dismissed in *Republic* IV (430e6–431b; *cf.* self-mastery at *Grg*. 491d), stand pressing ethical perplexities about the nature and unity of the self: *Who* is in charge? *Whose* desires are met, and whose denied? *Who* is free from *what* in an 'autonomous' act? The reflexive '*auto*' in *autonomia* presumes an easy and straightforward answer to these questions – as indeed in the political arena it may have seemed to be.[44] But there is nothing easy or straightforward about it. The immensely sophisticated moral psychology and social psychology of *Republic* IV, VII and IX are aimed at addressing these questions properly, systematically and fundamentally.

But the epistemology of the *Republic* stands at the heart of Plato's answers to these questions, making good the *Protagoras'* claim that 'to be self-defeated, or weaker than oneself is nothing other than ignorance, and to be master of oneself, or stronger than oneself is nothing other than wisdom' (*Prt.* 358c1–3). Seeking ideal knowledge is the good from which the positive things ordinarily associated with autonomy flow.

The freedom which pursuing ideal knowledge for its own sake entails is freedom from the delusive enticements of sensation and appearance. For by enacting epistemic values pervasively, granting them ultimate authority in evaluating the merit of other things, becoming a knower orders and transforms cognitions, perceptions, and motivations, sensations and appearances, transforming our relation to them and their appeal. One is liberated from the distractions and false or illusory attractions of sensations, and likewise from social pressures grounded in these. We are freed from unnecessary conflict and unhelpful desires – but not by

[44] It seems likely that Plato also intends to challenge the easy presumptions in the political notion of 'autonomy' as well, concerning the inherent worth of a city living under its own customs, as well as the construal of freedom simply in terms of a lack of determination by a foreign power. But that is a separate discussion.

suppressing or alienating them or the sensate part of ourselves, for that now works in concert with our knowledge-aiming activities.

The same psychic reordering according to epistemic values also makes one answerable for one's actions and desires. For one's motivations and interests, and the presumptions these rest on, become free from whatever ends are *un*accountable, by being incorporated into one's account of reality, insofar as that is possible. It is not just that one is in the habit of giving accounts insofar as one has experience in practices of ideal knowing. The practice of ideal knowing itself demands a global reach, so that sense-based cognitions, their related evaluations and impulses, as well as recognition of socially-based norms and their associated desires, are made sense of by relating them to the project of pursuing ideal cognition. One has an account of one's actions in the world, and that account is tied to one's account of reality. While accountability is primarily and initially accountability for one's thoughts, the activity of pursuing it makes one such as to be likewise accountable for one's feelings, motivations, and actions.

Further, since ideal knowing in *Republic* V–VII is a practice in *account-giving*, an inter-personal dimension is built into the kind of accountability that knowing provides. One does not recite but *gives* a rational explanation *to others*; and in its ambition to be a coherent, correct and explanatory account, this account is in principle open to critique by others. In seeking knowledge, one recognises others are entitled to hold one to account for one's thoughts. These others are so entitled just insofar as, and because, they are themselves knowledge-seekers, animated by the aim to attain maximally clear, precise, coherent, reliable and explanatory cognition. This captures the sort of mutual respect that a conventional notion of autonomy aims at, but without supposing that this respect is owed to whatever someone thinks or wants simply because it is their genuine thought or desire. If someone is a knower their thoughts *are* their own – one *can* give and defend explanatory accounts *oneself*, because one has in fact made *epistēmē* authoritative in one's soul; but the value in those thoughts comes from their being bound by the norms of knowing.

Pursuing knowledge – ideal knowledge as that is defined in the *Republic*, pursued for its own sake – is thus a deeply ethical activity. It is not just one of the good things one might do; it is *the* activity by which one becomes good.[45] Such an ethical picture accommodates the good

[45] And perhaps, in keeping with the isomorphism of personal and political, it is also the fundamental activity by which a polis becomes good – see Lane 'Persuasion et force dans la politique platonicienne', (translated by F. Teisserenc, in A. Brancacci, D. El Murr, and D. P. Taormina (eds.) *Aglaïa: autour de*

supposed to attach to self-determination and freedom, without paradox, arbitrariness or alienation of parts of the self. And it does so while making it evident why, and in what sense, morality is something each person must do for herself. I am not the source of the rule, and it is not *mine* in some special way. Order, determinacy, coherence and stability are features of intelligible reality, and this is the source of the rules that apply to ourselves as knowers – rules of precision, truth, proportionateness, aptness, articulability, accountability. I am, however, the enforcer of these rules, and thereby competent to be the author of my thoughts and actions. My enforcement, however, is not tyranny; rather the application of these rules to discipline my cognitions arises from what animates true dialectic and knowledge-seeking in the right spirit – namely, my love of truth, and willingness to do anything for its sake.

Platon. Mélanges offerts à Monique Dixsaut, Paris: Vrin, 2010), pp. 81–108), which argues that the ultimate political ideal for Plato is the rule of knowledge.